

Message Text

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64
ACTION AID-20

INFO OCT-01 IO-14 ISO-00 SS-20 SPC-03 NSC-07 AGR-20 EB-11

RSC-01 COME-00 TRSE-00 SWF-02 PC-10 USIA-15 DODE-00

INT-08 CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 ACDA-19 DRC-01 /162 W
----- 011319

R 291515Z MAR 74
FM USMISSION USUN NY
TO SECSTATE WASDC 3281

UNCLAS USUN 1048

EO 11652: NA
TAGS: XA TPHY
SUBJ: AFRICAN DROUGHT

REF: STATE 057894; USUN 1000

1. APROPOS OF AFRICAN DROUGHT QUESTION TWO USUN OFFICERS WHO HAVE TRAVELED RECENTLY IN BOTH EAST AND WEST AFRICA RETURNED WITH IMPRESSION THAT CHANGES IN AFRICAN CLIMATE MAY BE GEOGRAPHICALLY EVEN MORE WIDESPREAD THAN WE HAD REALIZED FROM REPORTING RECEIVED HERE.

2. NEITHER OF THESE OFFICERS HAS SCIENTIFIC TRAINING. HOWEVER, FROM DISCUSSIONS WITH OFFICIALS AND LEADERS IN BOTH EAST AND WEST AFRICA, THEY INDEPENDENTLY REACHED CONCLUSION THAT SPREAD OF DROUGHT CONDITIONS BY NO MEANS CONFINED TO SAHEL AND EAST AFRICA. EACH REPAREDLY ENCOUNTERED IDEA THAT BULK OF AFRICAN CONTINENT MAY NOW BE UNDERGOING CHANGE OF CLIMATE RATHER THAN SERIES OF "BAD YEARS". IN SOME WEST AFRICAN COASTAL COUNTRIES OF HEAVY RAINFALL, ONSET OF RAINY SEASON INCREASINGLY DELAYED IN PAST TWO YEARS. "HARMATTAN" HAS THIS BEEN SUSTAINED PHENOMENON IN SOME WEST AFRICAN COASTAL AREAS IN WHICH ITS PRESENCE IS NORMALLY ONLY HINTED.

3. NEITHER OF REPORTING OFFICERS, AND CERTAINLY NOT USUN, SUGGESTS THAT THESE NON-SCIENTIFIC, IMPRESSIONISTIC REPORTS UNCLASSIFIED

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BE GIVEN UNDUE EMPHASIS. HOWEVER, THEIR IMPRESSIONS WERE

SUFFICIENTLY STRONG TO SUGGEST THAT US GOVERNMENT MIGHT WELL TAKE PRECAUTION OF FOCUSSING QUALIFIED SCIENTIFIC EYES ON QUESTION. PERHAPS STUDIES BASED ON ERTS DATA CAN SUGGEST SOME CONCLUSIONS. ADDITIONALLY, LEADING ACADEMIC CLIMATOLOGISTS MIGHT BE STIMULATED TO EXAMINE SITUATION.

4. SAHELIAN DROUGHT, DESPITE TERRIBLE TOLL IN HUMAN LIFE AND WEALTH, HAS PRODUCED LESS REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL FALLOUT THAN MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER DROUGHT IN EAST AFRICAN UPLANDS WILL HAVE SIMILARLY LIMITED POLITICAL EFFECTS. SHOULD HEAVILY-POPULATED, RELATIVELY DEVELOPED COASTAL AREAS OF TRADITIONALLY HEAVY RAINFALL BE SUBJECTED TO SEASONAL WATER SHORTAGES, DEPLETING RESERVOIRS THAT SUSTAIN CITY POPULATIONS AND PROVIDE HYDRO-ELECTRIC POWER, HUMAN TRAGEDY WOULD BE MORE DRAMATIC AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS MORE SERIOUS.

5. COMMENT BY AMB SCALI: I AM SUFFICIENTLY STRUCK BY THESE OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS TO RECOMMEND THAT USG TRY TO RE-EXAMINE THE PROBLEM. IF CLIMATE CHANGES ARE OCCURRING AND LARGE POPULATIONS IF FOR MAJOR READJUSTMENT DIFFICULTIES, THE WORLD CANNOT AFFORD TO BE LATE IN IDENTIFYING A CRISIS OF LARGER DIMENSIONS THAN INITIALLY FORCAST.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: DISASTER RELIEF, POLITICAL SITUATION, METEOROLOGICAL DATA, TRAVEL REPORTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 29 MAR 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: n/a
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 JAN 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974USUNN01048
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740070-0038
From: USUN NEW YORK
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t1974032/aaaaabuf.tel
Line Count: 84
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AID
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: STATE 057894; USUN 1000
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: shawdg
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 08 AUG 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <08-Aug-2002 by elbezefj>; APPROVED <12 DEC 2002 by shawdg>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: AFRICAN DROUGHT
TAGS: TPHY, SWEL, EAID, XA, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005